

Abstract Sculpture

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Abstract

Abstract sculpture is a form of sculptural creation, characterized by its pure representation of the overall structure of the sculpture. It distills the thoughts and spirits of art into its purest physical form to convey deeper emotions. Abstract sculpture has become one of the most important forms of expression in sculptural creation, using abstract structures to communicate feelings in space. It distinguishes itself from the traditional realistic sculpture, which expresses emotions and spirits through the physical appearance of objects. Abstract sculpture possesses a non-representational, pure, and concise form. This allows for a more direct and clear transmission of artistic perception with enriched the creative techniques, forms of expression, and material use of sculpture art. Abstract sculpture emphasizes on the subjective spirit of the artists and the vitality of art. Its form of expression is a continuation and an elevation of the traditional sculpture. By simplifying the complex external forms, abstract sculpture broadens audiences' thoughts and aesthetic senses through its concise and condensed form.

Abstract sculpture reflects the artists' emphasis on the nature of the structure and a deeper pursuit of the essence of the object during their creation. It breaks the traditional concept of sculptural creation, which adheres to realism as its standard, and add to the choices in sculptural creation.

Key words: Sculptural art; Abstract sculpture; Sculptural creation

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1. ABSTRACT AND ABSTRACT SCULPTURE

In contrast to representational art, abstract art reflects the shared attributes within natural objects. It serves as an elevation of their external appearances and is the result of subjective processing by the artists. Abstract art is an extraction of the shared elements from objects based on the artists' practice, followed by summarization, induction, and processing to distill its essence, thus representing their fundamental characteristics. Abstraction cannot exist without physical objects; rather, it can be viewed as a representation of the objective image and a depiction of the commonality of matters. It is a thought process of abstracting from the objective world.

Abstract sculpture is not limited to reproducing or depicting the objective world. Instead, the objects are geometrically processed, using three-dimensional composition as the foundation, and combining the objects with the artists' thoughts. It is entirely shaped by the artists' inner feelings and styles. Abstract sculpture utilizes the combination of elements such as points, lines, surfaces, and bodies to create shapes, combining, arranging and dissembling them in space to reflect the nature and inherent laws of objects. The processed abstract shapes convey certain meanings, constituting a visual experience of morphological aesthetics.

The distinction among abstract sculpture, representational sculpture, and symbolic sculpture lies in their approaches. Abstract sculpture is a processed representation of the spirits of the external objective world, while representational sculpture directly reflects the specific images of the physical objects. Abstract sculpture is created with concepts of essence, purity, conciseness, and harmony, while representational sculpture is based on the physical images and direct connection with external objective reality, representing principles such as anatomical structure and perspective and reflecting

the true state of the object. Symbolic sculpture refers to the organized selection of physical objects and is an image that appears after the artists' unique subjective motional processing. It has an indirect connection with external objective matters, and the imagery is indirect. The most significant difference between abstract sculpture and symbolic sculpture lies in their representation of appearance. Although both sculptural techniques externalize inner emotions directly through form, symbolic sculpture does not completely abandon the physical form like abstract sculpture. Rather, it combines the concrete form with emotions. On the other hand, abstract sculpture completely departs from the objectivity and is an externalization of spirit and emotion.

2. THE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF ABSTRACT SCULPTURE

2.1 Concise sculptural form

In abstract sculpture, purity embodies the materialization of sculptural aesthetics. Artists deconstruct the objective reality of matters, discarding direct connections with the natural world, and establish an indirect channel of spiritual communication. They restore the natural object into its most essential form, creating entities with a broader scope of expression. Abstract sculptures have some of the complex structural forms in representational sculpture, with more smooth lines or acute angles. Therefore, abstract sculpture has the characteristics of a concise sculptural form. From a sculptural perspective, abstract sculpture discards the objective appearance and delves into the internal structure of matters, conveying the essence of the core directly. Meanwhile, artists employ a rational, non-representational creative language to create forms that can interpret psychological activities. Within abstract sculpture, there are one or more ideas and spirits that artists intend to convey. It encompasses not only the artists' personal thoughts and feelings about certain events but also the need for a spiritual resonance with a broader audience. This results in the placement of multiple concepts within an abstract sculpture that is both simple in form and rich in aesthetic qualities.

The works of the sculptural artist Constantin Brancusi embody form in the material, utilizing new creative concepts in themes and forms. They emphasize that the external image of matters is not necessarily real, but that the true essence lies within. His work "The Cock" (Figure 1) adopts a geometric abstract form, showcasing the aesthetic, spiritual, and sculptural aspects of the art. It simplifies the shape of a rooster into concise lines, capturing the moment of its stance. The overall sculpture has no superfluous depiction, yet it presents a vivid and expressive image. The shape of Brancusi's work "Fish"

(Figure 2) is primarily expressed through a sense of lines and speed. Although it does not realistically sculpt the physical form of a fish, no details of its body or scales, the simplicity of the sculpture evokes the image of a fish swimming in the water. While it does not solidify the image of the animal, it shows the dynamism of the fish.



Figure 1
"The Cock" by Constantin Brancusi



Figure 2
"Fish" by Constantin Brancusi

Abstract forms provide audiences unlimited space for imagination, enabling artists to express their deepest thoughts. They not only convey the artists' creative inspiration but also evoke resonance within the audience.

Abstract forms showcase not only the artists' abstract thinking but also their understanding and perception of the world, allowing viewers to feel the power of art.

2.2 Interplay of Materials

Abstract sculpture is simple in form yet rich in aesthetic qualities. As the expressive language of abstract sculpture, the material must be used in a way that seamlessly unifies the form and emotion of the artwork. Through continuous exploration and innovation of sculpture materials, the material selection and sculptural languages are continuously expanded. The use of materials, as the medium for presenting a work, not only affects the expressiveness of the piece but also influences its emotional expression and transmission. In addition to serving as a medium for presenting sculpture, the material also carries emotions of the artists. It plays an irreplaceable role in the creation of abstract sculpture.

Sculptor Joel Shapiro utilizes geometric shapes to create sculptures with an architectural sensibility. He mainly focuses on the relationship between abstraction and representation, using his work to explore the relationship between the transience and permanence. He skillfully employs diverse geometric components of various to compose sculptures, such as the work "Untitled" (Figure 3). The wooden geometric matters are interconnected by iron, screws, and nails, prompting a reconsideration of the perception of matter and space. Here, the inherent attributes of the material correspond to the theme, allowing the audience to conceptualize and image. Shapiro's works are composed of 'meaningful forms' assembled from 'unintentional forms'. Henry Moore pursues the texture of objects in his creations, preserving the inherent beauty of the materials. His work "Reclining Figure" (Figure 4) features a simple composition, with a concise and abstract form that displays the rough proportion of the human body and the structural space of the human skeleton. The entire statue is in a reclining posture, and the use of bronze amplifies the sculpture's internal tension. The handling of the volume changes in the neck, chest, and abdomen through circular apertures results in a smooth and natural form, exuding a boundless artistic charm. This allows the audience to tangibly perceive the connection between different parts of the sculpture, as well as the varying changes between the sculpture's form and background, thereby creating a sense of beauty.

As a three-dimensional art form, abstract sculpture replies on the material substances as the spiritual embodiment of the artwork. Compared with other art forms, the use of materials in sculpture is particularly pronounced. Abstract sculptures reflect the historical culture and technological advancements of different periods, and as eras progress, the language of sculptures evolves in tandem. Materials, too, continue to progress, providing a material foundation for the expansion of

sculptural language. Artists should fully explore and utilize the expanded selection of sculptural materials, thereby rediscovering and reconstructing new material significances.



Figure 3
"Untitled" by Joel Shapiro



Figure 4
"Reclining Figure" by Henry Moore

2.3 Emotional Harmony

Abstract sculpture is the external manifestation of emotions and spirits. It possesses a unique form and way of handling emotions, placing a greater emphasis on the expression of emotions and spirits. Emotions run through the entire creation process of abstract sculpture, reflecting the artists' perspective and concepts, and generating cultural symbols. The infusion and feedback of emotions in this process are the charm of abstract sculpture. Through concrete forms, abstract sculpture enhances

emotions, evoking resonance within the aesthetic subjects in the form of emotions.

The work piece “Rouge Triomphant (a.k.a. Triumphant Red)” by Alexander Calder is an innovative sculpture featuring curved forms suspended on metal wires. Through the flow of air or the manipulation by the viewers, each movement displays a different shape, allowing the viewers to feel a sense of airflow and a transformation of space and creating a three-dimensional “space painting”. Sculpture offers a perception beyond the three-dimensional space, where the concept of time is integrated into the sculpture creation. The transmission of emotion occurs alongside the movement of sculptures, while time flows continuously. In Calder’s dynamic sculptural piece, characterized by bold primary colors, enormous size, and a sense of hovering and floating, one can discern his exploration of the ‘dynamic composition’, where he discovered the perfect combination of dynamism and composition. Utilizing mechanical devices and achieving perfect balance, he pioneered a new style of sculpture. Through manually operated, wind-driven, mechanically movable, and directly suspended sculptural works, Calder successfully entered the spatial realm of modern public environments. Abstract sculptors use artistic techniques to depict events occurring in space, creating the forms of objects based on the surrounding environmental characteristics, and thus establishing a harmonious emotional and coordinated relationship with the broader environment. The author’s attempt at abstract sculpture, “Home”, also embodies a realization of contemporary society. The lifestyle of modern people differs significantly from that of the previous generation, largely due to the substantial changes in economic and cultural background, with the widespread use of the internet being a crucial factor. A better life is the objective of the lifestyle transformation in this new era, reflecting the diverse needs of individuals. Various changes have emerged due to the subtle changes of lifestyle, influencing the dynamics of communication among people. The use of steel and cold elements reflects the author’s understanding of this new lifestyle, juxtaposed with the incorporation of warm light to create a contrasting emotional experience, conveying a sense of both conflict and harmony, which is the message that this artwork aims to express.

The fundamental objective of abstract sculpture is the expression of emotion. Artists study and comprehend objective matters, infusing their work with sincere and genuine expressions, thus creating a material manifestation of emotions. The emotional expressiveness of abstract sculpture is remarkably prominent, concurrently reflecting a strong personal artistic style. It represents the fusion of the artists with the sculpture and serves as a form of cultural communication, carrying significant positive implications in the reasonable representation and development of artists’ emotions in abstract sculpture.

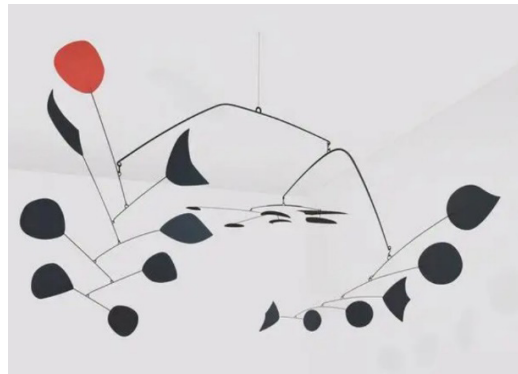


Figure 5
“Rough Triomphant (Triumphant Red)” by Joel Shapiro



Figure 6
“Home” by Ying Li

3. IMPORTANCE OF ABSTRACT SCULPTURE

As a form of sculptural expression, abstract sculpture is closely related to the development of modern science, technology, and society. It requires rigorous scientific theoretical knowledge as its support and is a simplification based on complexity. The artistic expression language of abstract sculpture has become an indispensable creative method in modern art. It departs from the traditional realistic representation, no longer merely imitating or reproducing physical matters. The form, subject matter, and expressive language of sculpture have become more abundant. Moreover, it is not a complete abandonment or negation of tradition but rather a further development in the expression techniques of traditional sculpture, representing an elevation of tradition. Abstract sculpture

possesses a more liberated artistic space for imagination, offering a more complete portrayal of the artists' intended message, transcending linguistic differences to convey its spiritual essence in entirety.

In his book titled "Introduction to Sculpture", Zhenglong Xu mentioned, "The significance of abstractionism lies in the fact that when art is disconnected from external forms, artists are more focused on the treatment of essence and the choice of materials and are more concerned with the essence and significance of the nature (including ego)." In the realm of abstract sculptural language, although the form of abstract sculpture does not emphasize the physical forms as much as figurative and symbolic sculptures do, it still adheres to the scientific principles of spatial perspective and follows aesthetic qualities in emotional handling. This also requires artists to further summarize, integrate, and reorganize based on

their understanding of proportion, structure, and aesthetic knowledge. Abstract sculpture emphasizes the artists' subjective spirit and the independent life of art, and it is no longer restricted by external form. Additionally, the use of new industrial materials and ready-made products has enriched the creation of abstract sculpture.

Abstract sculpture is an essential component of modern sculptural art, bringing forth positive and far-reaching influences on the development of sculpture both domestically and internationally. Exploring the concepts, artistic features, and emotional expressions of abstract forms in sculptural works is of great significance for promoting the advancement of sculptural art. Abstract sculpture is not only a form of artistic expression but also provides a basis for the innovation and development of art.